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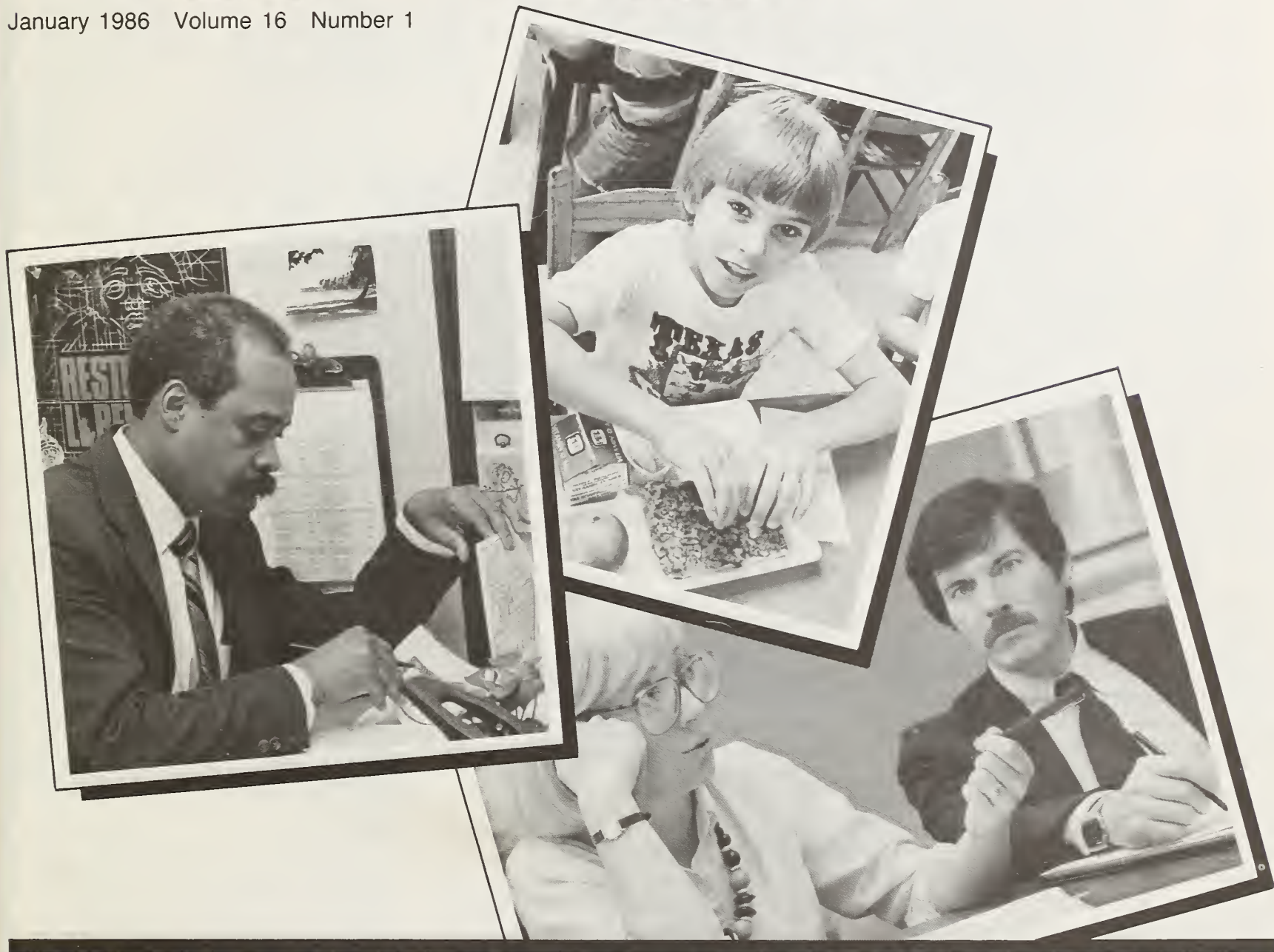
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# Food & Nutrition

January 1986 Volume 16 Number 1

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**T**his issue focuses on improving communications among federal, state, and local food program managers. • Examples from around the country illustrate special projects or efforts that: • build new lines of communication among people working on similar problems; • help people share ideas, expertise, and technical know-how; • and improve service to food program participants by making information more readily available.



# Teamwork Gets Results For Food Stamp Managers

Team problem solving is what a new state self-help effort in the Food Stamp Program is all about. Initiated and supported by the Food and Nutrition Service, the effort enables the most talented federal, state, and local food stamp managers to work together in helping food stamp agencies that have high error rates or other problems in managing their programs.

"It's the best example I know of a federal-state partnership," says Virgil Conrad, deputy administrator for family nutrition programs at FNS. "Although it doesn't cost a lot of money, we're harnessing knowledge so that people don't have to re-invent the wheel to do a better job. What better way to help a state than to get people who are executing the job well in another state to become the teachers."

## Every region is involved

Each of the seven FNS regional offices has organized a technical assistance team that will provide help where needed. Two of the regions are sharing a team, so there are six in all.

The teams consist of regional, state, and local experts, including state and local prosecutors and investigators, staff from state Inspector General offices, and claims collections specialists. States contribute the time and skills of their people, and FNS contributes funds for traveling as well as overall direction.

Reaction to the teams has been enthusiastic. "Part of the success of the effort," says Conrad, "can be measured in the commitment of the states to put up team members. Here are state people willing not only to improve their own programs, but to help others in managing theirs."

One of the teams' main concerns is helping states cut down on errors made in certifying applicants and in determining recipients' benefit levels. Bringing down high error rates is a priority for many states, since they face potential sanctions from FNS for levels that exceed national limits. The teams are also helping states improve methods for prosecuting fraud and collecting claims for overpayments made to recipients.

"Nationally, we've seen a lot of progress in making the Food Stamp Pro-

gram more accountable," says Conrad. "National error rates are coming down. There are more fraud investigations than ever before. And tougher penalties for violators mean recipients can lose access to their benefits if they defraud the program."

"But states have had varying degrees of success with bringing down their error rates and fighting fraud. We encourage states to go after fraud by giving them enhanced funding for anti-fraud activities. Usually, the federal government pays for half of states' administrative costs in operating the Food Stamp Program. For certain anti-fraud activities, we increase this to 75 percent."

"States who are using this funding well are seeing tremendous savings. By successfully preventing fraudulent benefits from going out, some are saving as much as \$70 for each dollar in enhanced funding they receive from us. Other states, however, are not even preventing a full dollar in fraudulent benefits from going out for each dollar in enhanced funding they receive."

Many states with high error rates have asked for guidance from FNS. Providing this guidance and helping states better use the enhanced funding is what the technical assistance teams are designed to do.

## Effort is part of Operation Awareness

The teams grow out of and are part of FNS' highly successful food stamp management campaign known as Operation Awareness. Now just finishing its third year, Operation Awareness has encouraged state managers to share skills and problem-solving techniques through conferences, newsletters, catalogues of state and local anti-fraud efforts, and other activities.

Through the State Exchange Program, an important part of Operation Awareness, FNS has paid for food stamp managers to travel to other states and regions to view successful management techniques.

The technical assistance teams add a new dimension to the state exchange concept. "You now have a pool of knowledge from several states organized and available to everyone," Conrad says. He sees the teams work-

ing as a communications clearing-house that enables the federal government to carry out technical assistance in a very cost-effective, practical way.

Conrad and other food stamp managers at FNS had considered the idea of hiring a national consultant to travel around the country and offer assistance. They rejected this idea because the services of such a specialist would be expensive and because there might be resistance from states to a high-level outsider coming in to address their problems.

Conrad is pleased with this decision. "We couldn't have done better on the market," he says. "The teams are people who have learned by the school of hard knocks how to solve problems. They're academically prepared, but they've also learned from experience. FNS regional staff have done an excellent job of marshalling the talent within their regions."

The teams have achieved some dramatic results in the year and a half since they were set up. Each FNS regional office had the flexibility to set up its technical assistance team in its own way, so every team is somewhat different. The following highlights illustrate how the teams work and what kind of results they're getting in various areas:

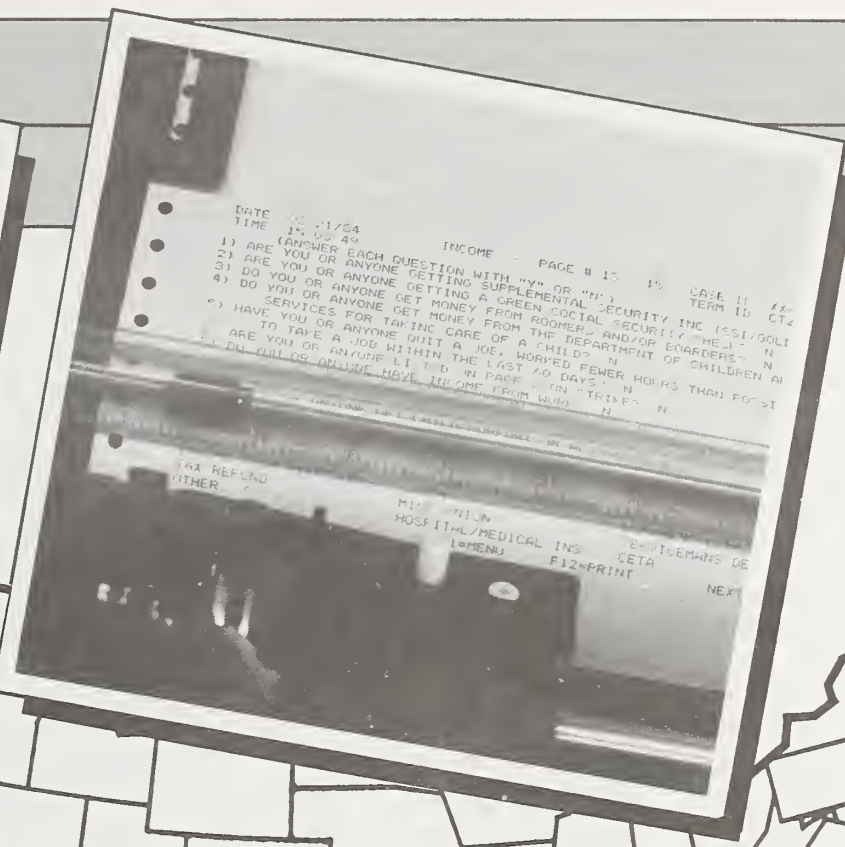
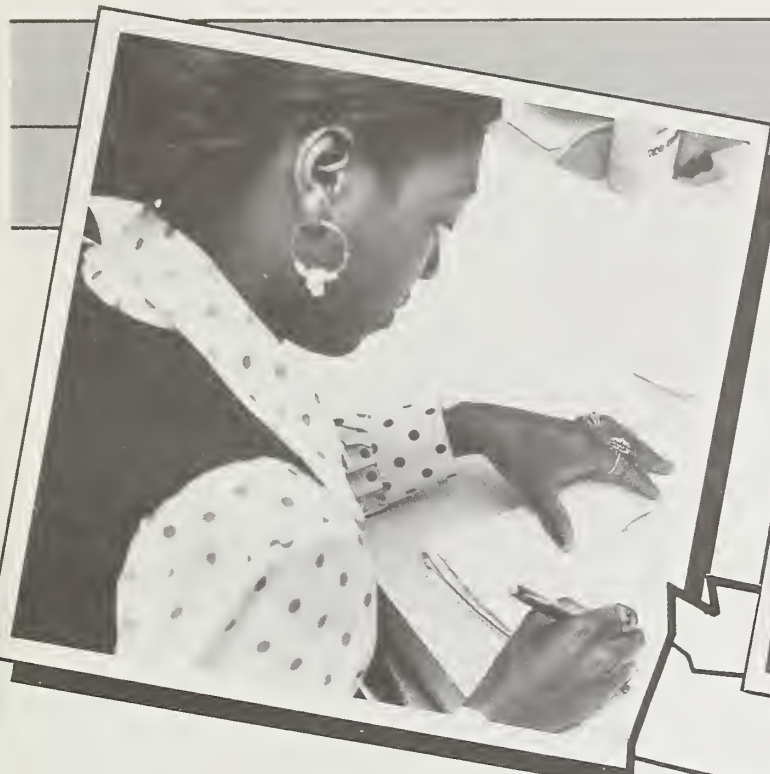
## Mid-Atlantic and Northeast

FNS' Mid-Atlantic and Northeast regional offices have joined forces with a single team made up of experts from both regions. The team is called STAFF, for Special Technical Assistance for Anti-Fraud Funding. STAFF activities have generated a good deal of publicity and interest in both regions, and a number of state agencies have made some changes in their operations as a result of the team's work.

For example, at the encouragement of the team, last February local food stamp staff from Mercer County, New Jersey, visited Camden County's Special Investigations Unit, which prevents certification of ineligible applicants for food stamps and AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children). Mercer County staff were so impressed with the unit, they set up a similar operation themselves within a few months.

STAFF member John Murray, assistant director of special investigations





in Maryland, expanded on this effort by spending 3 days training 33 investigators from 10 New Jersey counties in anti-fraud techniques.

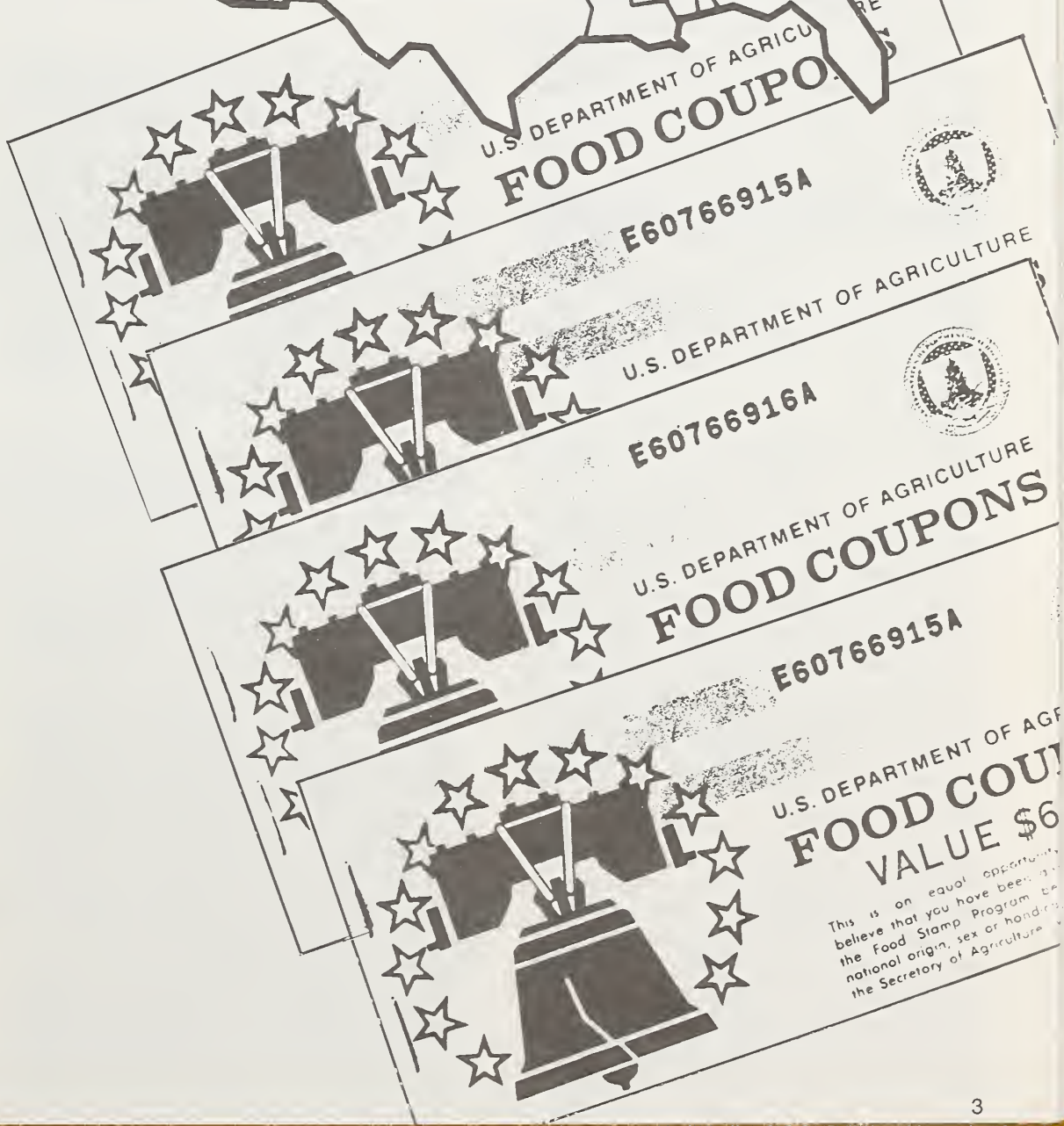
The team also helped the New York State Department of Social Services reach out to the county level. In September, all STAFF team members got together in Albany to review the model county anti-fraud system New York has designed to strengthen local district fraud control activities.

Team members heartily endorsed the system, which is based on the idea that food stamp client fraud is most effectively investigated and followed up at the county level by specialized units. Once the system is in place statewide, all New York counties will be required to give special attention to food stamp claims collections and investigations.

In another area, STAFF member Paul McCann, administrative hearings officer for Rhode Island, visited the District of Columbia to offer advice on how D.C. could improve its fraud and fair hearings system. Meeting with top D.C. officials last spring, McCann explained how standard forms, case-worker training, and procedures for presenting testimony and evidence have helped the relatively small Rhode Island state agency process a large volume of fraud and fair hearing cases.

### Visits result in changes

STAFF member Ralph Sullivan, assistant prosecutor for Union County, New Jersey, traveled a bit further. This past June, he spent a week helping work out a prosecution agreement between the Virgin Islands Attorney General's office and the Islands' Depart-





ment of Social Welfare.

Sullivan was sent to the Virgin Islands because the Department of Social Welfare was having difficulty qualifying for enhanced funding from FNS. They had been unable to get the required prosecution agreement with their Attorney General's office specifying exactly what the responsibilities of each office would be in prosecuting welfare fraud cases.

The previous year the Attorney General's office had not prosecuted any cases of welfare fraud, even though the Department of Social Welfare had identified hundreds of cases of potential fraud.

Armed with travel arrangements and appointments set up by regional STAFF members, and a sample prosecution agreement hammered out ahead of time with regional food stamp staffer Leonard Klepner, Sullivan met with officials of the Virgin Islands Departments of Law and Social Welfare.

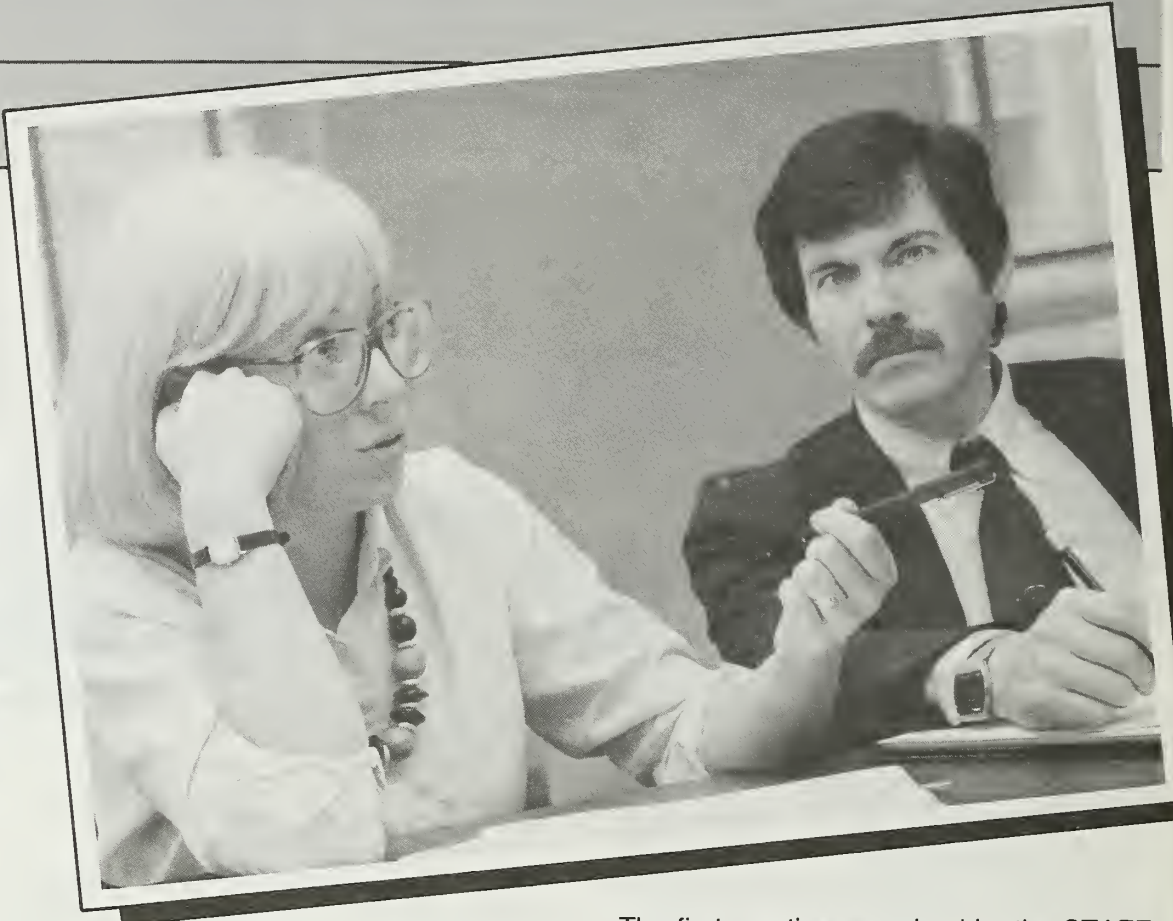
"I explained to the Attorney General's office how my unit up in Union County is funded, and the various expenses that are paid by FNS," Sullivan says. "And I explained that the funding would not only benefit the Department of Social Welfare, but also would cover some of the expenses of the Attorney General's office for the prosecution of fraud cases. I don't think they were aware of the extent of funding that was available."

By the end of the week, Sullivan had gotten a commitment from the Attorney General's office to become more involved in investigating and prosecuting welfare fraud. "I think we accomplished a lot while I was down there," he says.

He was pleased to see follow-up articles in the Virgin Islands press about a new crackdown on welfare fraud by the Attorney General's office. The draft agreement he worked out during the visit was later finalized, and the Virgin Islands is now getting enhanced funding from FNS.

#### **Arrangement works well for everyone**

John Sullivan of FNS' Mid-Atlantic regional office is STAFF coordinator for his region and handles the details of many of the team's efforts. "At the regional office we work out the funding, the liaison work, and the publicity," he



The first meeting organized by the STAFF team in October 1984 resulted in a number of recommendations for states having problems with their anti-fraud efforts.

says. "The state and local team members actually go and supervise the technical assistance."

The arrangement, he says, works well. "When you set out to give technical assistance, you get asked for direct information. The state and local people have it. The people we're helping would rather talk to a county or state person than a federal person, because they have the same problems."

#### **Southeast**

FNS' Southeast region has focused on demonstrating innovative ideas in its technical assistance effort. Many of the states in the region are following up on advice they've gotten from their neighbors through the team's work.

In one exchange between Southeastern states, technical assistance team member Ed Pledger, deputy director of the Office of Fraud and Abuse with Georgia's Department of Human Resources, told a representative from North Carolina how Georgia intercepts state income tax refunds to repay outstanding food stamp claims.

North Carolina's Division of Social Services is now working on getting a bill through the state legislature which would allow the state to set up a simi-

lar tax intercept system in 1987.

State managers in Florida, South Carolina, and Tennessee are following up on a claims collection system they learned about during trips to Kentucky set up by the technical assistance team last spring.

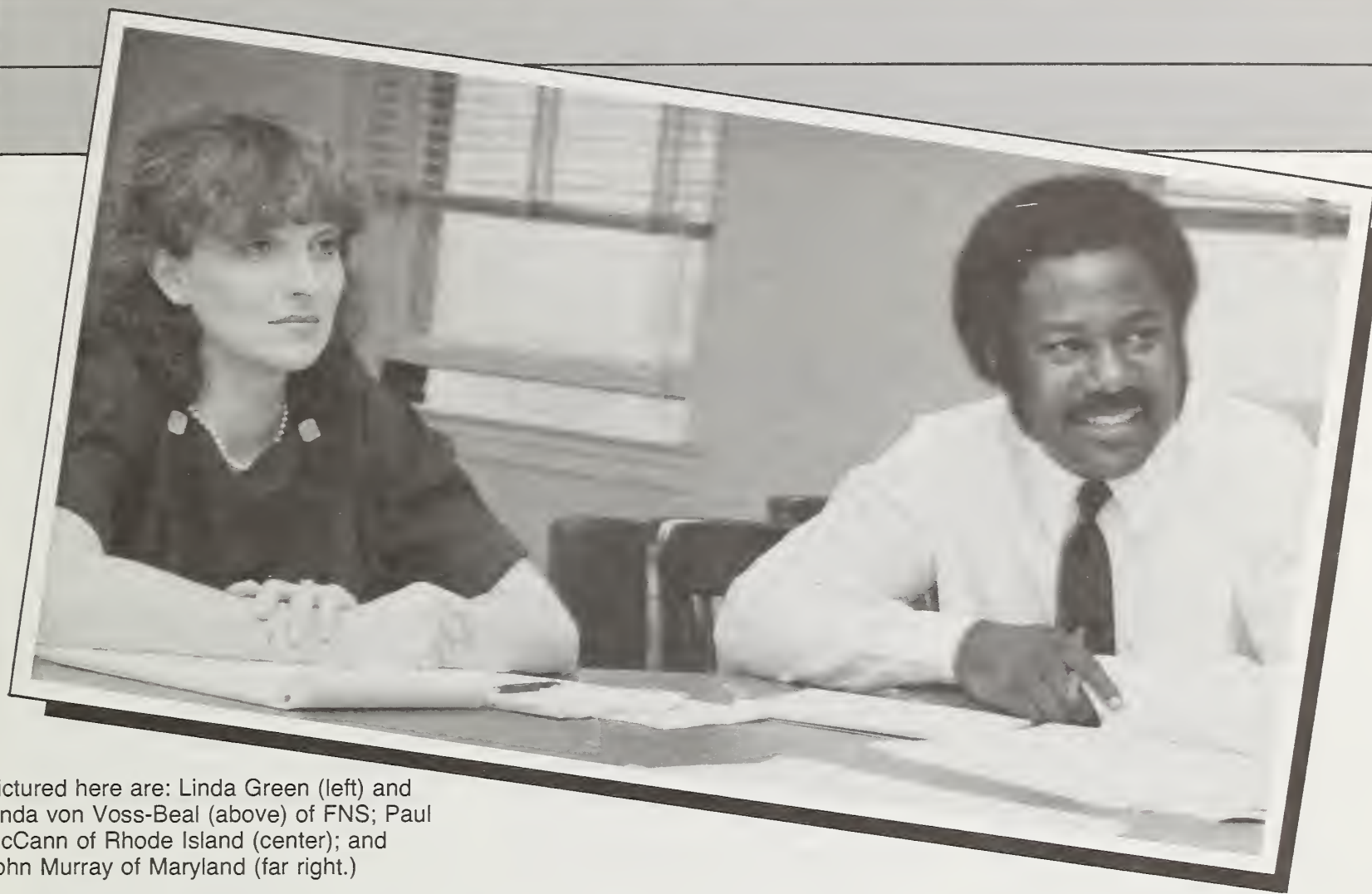
During the visits, Larry Hood, head of Kentucky's special collection unit, told representatives from the three states how his staff pursues collection of delinquent and hard-to-collect food stamp, AFDC, and child support claims. He also explained how Kentucky uses a private collection agency to go after debts that the state is unsuccessful in collecting.

All three visiting states plan to explore similar ideas. As a result of recommendations from regional and state resource team members, Kentucky plans to make some changes as well. To increase the amount of claims being established, the state will be setting up specialized claims worker positions in more than 60 counties.

#### **Other exchanges also successful**

Florida's "front-end" investigation technique, which allows suspicious cases to be checked for fraud before applicants are certified for program benefits, was the focus of a visit from





Pictured here are: Linda Green (left) and Linda von Voss-Beal (above) of FNS; Paul McCann of Rhode Island (center); and John Murray of Maryland (far right.)

representatives from Mississippi and Alabama. Regional resource team members suggested the visit because managers from the two states had been reluctant to try a similar system developed in California.

"We told them that Florida had picked up on this technique and was getting some very good results. We suggested they go over and take a look at it, and they agreed to do that," says Al Boutin, a food stamp supervisor with FNS' Southeast regional office.

Boutin coordinated a time in June for the two states to go to Florida, and funded the trip through the State Exchange Program. Bill Davis, director of the Division of Public Assistance Fraud in Florida's Auditor General's office, gave them a warm welcome.

He spent half a day explaining Florida's Fraud Investigator's Prevention Project (FIPP), under which eligibility workers refer suspicious cases to state investigators assigned to their certification office.

According to Davis, FIPP ran as a pilot project for 6 months last year in one food stamp office in each of four Florida districts. Each district was assigned an investigator, whose salary qualified for 75 percent enhanced funding from FNS.

During the 6 months, a total of 252 cases were referred to the investigators. Of these, 116 were approved, 26 were approved with benefit reduction, 98 were denied, and 11 people withdrew their applications after being confronted with the information found in the investigation. The total savings in actual outflow of food stamps amounted to nearly \$76,000.

Mississippi and Alabama representatives were impressed with the Florida project. Mississippi took immediate action, making the program an option available to counties in the state the following month. Now more than 50 of the 82 counties in Mississippi have access to investigative workers. Alabama plans to set up a similar system in the near future.

#### **"We should share with each other"**

Bill Davis enjoyed sharing his success with neighboring states. "If we can help somebody else, we certainly want to do it. We should share with each other," he says.

He is not surprised that the technical assistance team idea works. "I've been on both sides of the fence, and I've found that people in states will tend to listen to somebody in another state quicker than they will someone from

the regional office," he says. "Now, I don't know why, but that's just the way it goes!"

## **Midwest**

The Midwest technical assistance team includes staff from FNS' regional and field offices, regional staff from the U.S. Inspector General's office, and the Secret Service. State and county staff contribute expertise on a case-by-case basis, as do representatives from FNS' Washington office.

Team efforts got underway late in 1984 when members met with a newly formed state unit in Ohio developed to investigate food stamp fraud and trafficking. The team provided information on procedures for coordinating and reporting on investigations between state and federal agencies, as well as training on the investigative process.

"Since they were brand new to the game, they were open to all kinds of suggestions about what was needed," says Liza Cowden, a food stamp specialist with FNS' Midwest regional office, who is involved with the project.

In Illinois, a series of meetings between team members and state officials helped get a commitment from



the Illinois Department of Public Aid to pursue more food stamp fraud cases, and from the Illinois Bureau of Law Enforcement to become more involved in food stamp investigations as well.

### Team suggests improvements

In Michigan, the team helped with a broad-scale investigative follow-up to the state's wage matching effort. Using a computer, the state had compared food stamp records with Social Security wage files and come up with a list of thousands of people who had earned income that was not reported to the welfare office. Team members made three trips to Michigan to help state managers pare down the list and focus their investigative work on the most acute cases of fraud.

As the project, known as "Project Clear," developed, the technical assistance team made many suggestions for improvements. "The team was quite helpful," says Dave Wigent, director of the Office of Systems Development and Support in the Michigan Department of Social Services.

"We went along with their recommendations without exception because we could see how they were going to make the system an easier one to administer."

The state looked at cases for three programs—food stamps, AFDC, and general assistance. "We ended up with more than 6,000 cases that had reported little or no earnings, and we were finding that many of them had earnings in excess of \$10,000. Some had up to \$40,000," Wigent says.

"About 80 percent of these were referred for prosecution during the first year of Project Clear. So it's really been a boon to our state in terms of trying to clean up some of these fraudulent activities. It also has a tremendous deterrent effect on future recipients who may think about ripping off the system."

Through Project Clear, state managers have identified \$40 million in overpayments to recipients in the three programs they've been looking at. They're now involved in the second round of the project.

Noting the extensive press and television coverage of Michigan's effort, Liza Cowden says the technical assist-

ance team has given anti-fraud efforts added visibility. "I think the business of helping states is more attractive than sanctioning them," she says, "as necessary as sanctions might be."

### Southwest

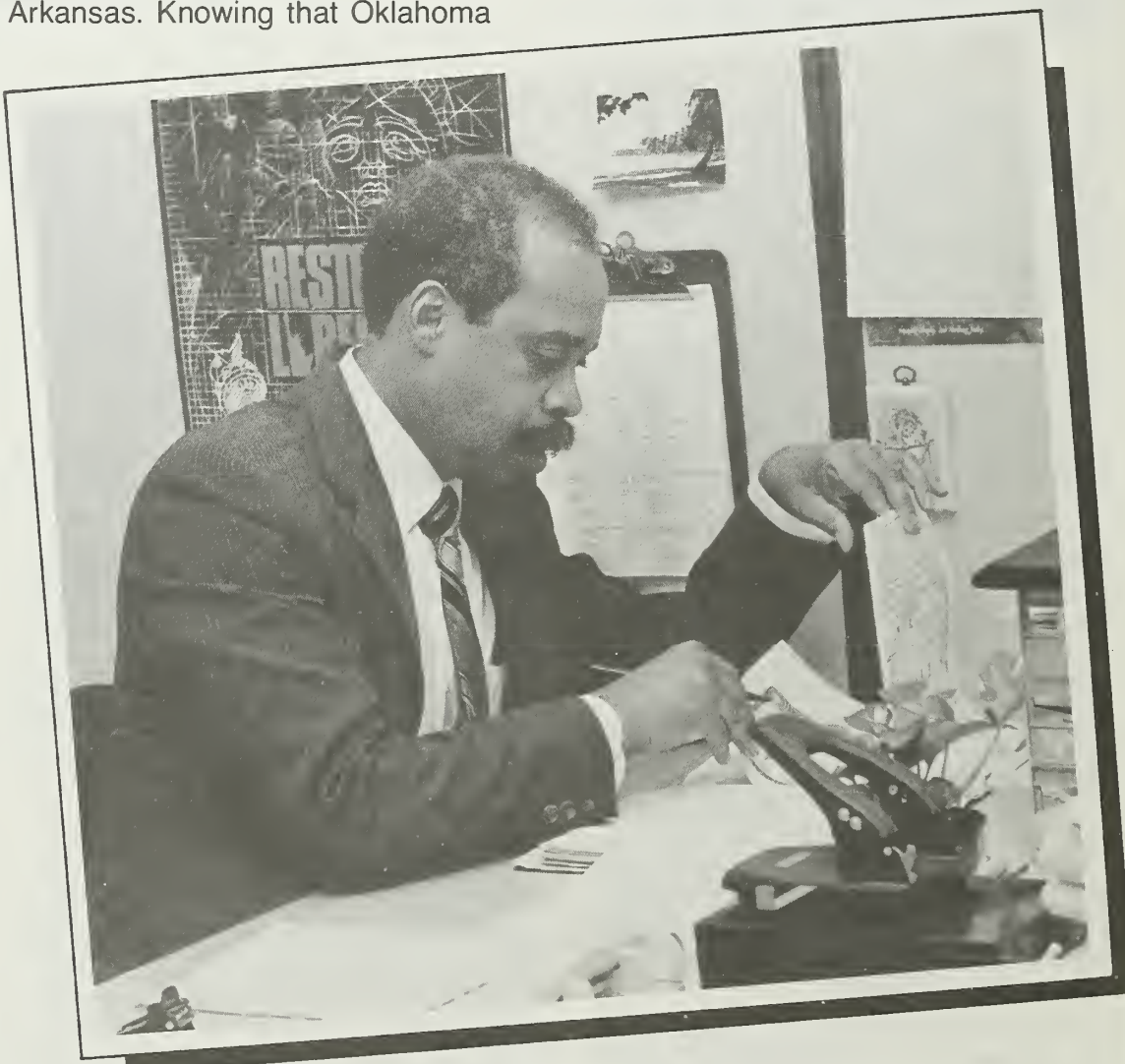
FNS' Southwest region has used its technical assistance team to expand its very active State Exchange Program. Instead of putting special emphasis on the team aspect of technical assistance, the regional office provides a list of team members and their specialties to states and encourages them to contact the individuals for help. The team has helped set up a number of very successful exchanges.

One of the most successful exchanges to date involved some idea-swapping between Oklahoma and Arkansas. Knowing that Oklahoma

was looking for an error-reduction strategy that would qualify for enhanced funding, FNS regional staff suggested Oklahoma take a look at Arkansas' Field Investigation concept.

Under Arkansas' system, when an eligibility worker finds a case suspected of being fraudulent, he or she refers it to the field investigator stationed in the certification office for a quick check within the application processing deadline. This prevents errors "up front" before applicants are certified.

The Oklahoma staff had been considering using special verification workers in their offices, but they found that these workers did not qualify for enhanced funding because they verified all error-prone cases. To qualify for enhanced funding, such workers must investigate cases suspected of being fraudulent.



Bob Jackson (above) is an investigator for the successful special investigations unit in Camden County, New Jersey. When an eligibility worker, like Cheryl Wright (op-

posite page), encounters questionable information on a food stamp application, Jackson or one of the county's other special investigators takes prompt action.



### Trip results in new project

A representative from Oklahoma traveled to Arkansas, using State Exchange funds, and decided to design a project similar to Arkansas' for her state. FNS approved enhanced funding for the new project, called Field Eligibility Examiners (FEE), and provided additional State Exchange funds for technical assistance team member Ann Ruffin of Arkansas to travel to Oklahoma to help train the new workers.

Oklahoma's FEE project got underway in July, with five investigators in Oklahoma City and five in Tulsa. The state began realizing savings right away—in the first 2 months, the program prevented more than \$130,000 in ineligible payments from being issued, and helped to identify a large number of overpayments as well. FEE investigators found that more than half of the cases they looked at involved false information.

Other successful exchanges included Arkansas' demonstrating a system that will help Texas expand its use of direct mail issuance of food stamps to prevent loss and improve efficiency of distribution.

Arkansas' automated system for assigning serial numbers to certified mail makes it possible to track food stamp benefits back to individual cases. The

Texas Department of Human Resources estimates the system will eliminate hundreds of hours of manual effort.

Texas, in turn, provided training and advice last July to investigators from New Mexico's new Program Integrity Bureau. Texas shared some of its techniques of successful food stamp fraud investigation and prosecution, such as prosecutor agreements and an automated case reporting system used by investigators. The two states discussed the potential for future interstate computer matches.

### Mountain Plains

The Mountain Plains regional office, like the Southwest, has chosen a less structured approach for its technical assistance team. The team operates primarily as a group of expert individuals whom food stamp managers can call on for guidance. The approach has gotten results in many areas.

In December 1984, for example, team members reviewed anti-fraud activities at the Kansas state office. As a result of their recommendations, state managers dramatically increased the amount of anti-fraud funding they were receiving from FNS—from \$20,000 in 1984 to \$200,000 in 1985. In addition, the state set up a unit of pre-

certification investigators in Wichita and has plans for similar units in Topeka and Kansas City.

In Colorado, the team suggested changes that would enable the state to pass 75-percent funding through to county prosecutors. The Colorado Department of Social Services worked to get the needed changes through the state legislature, and is now negotiating agreements with all prosecutors in the state.

### Project in Utah goes statewide

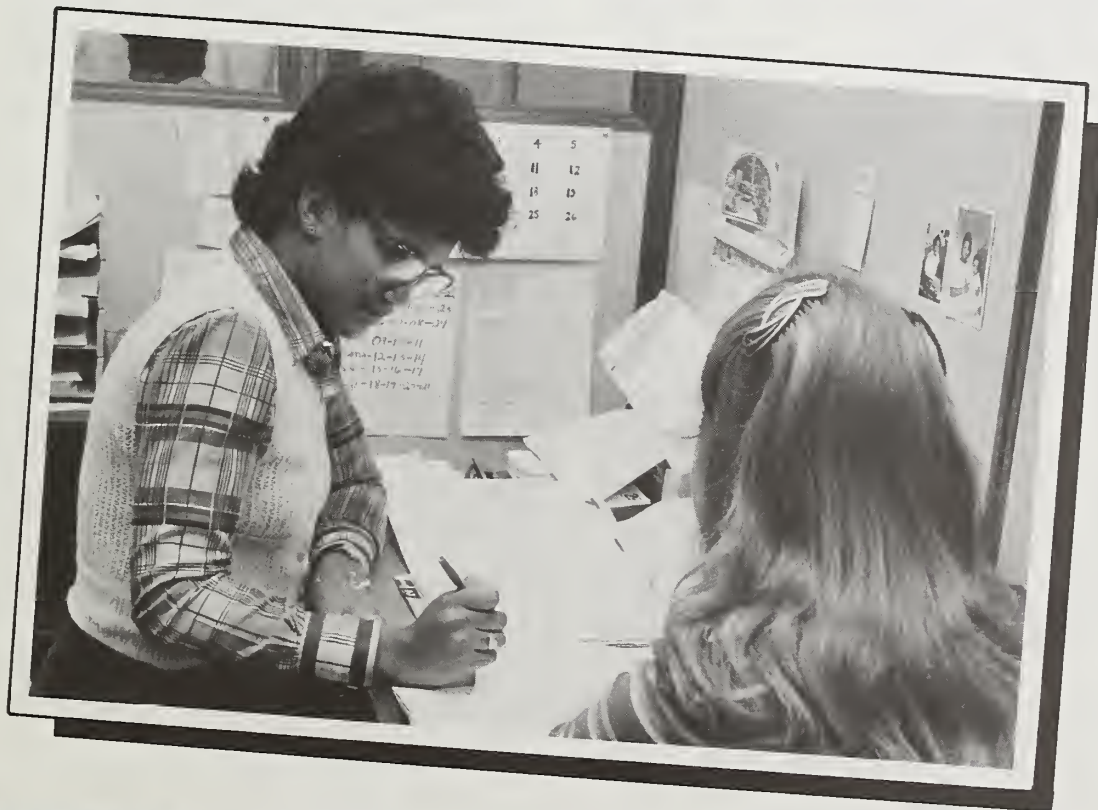
In Utah, state representatives worked closely with FNS regional staff in trying to find a solution to the state's high error rate. The regional staff found that because Utah had three state level offices dealing with the Food Stamp Program, there was no one organization to coordinate special activities, making change in the state's program somewhat difficult to accomplish.

They thought a project called Project Integrity—used by a number of states around the country—might help. The basic goal of Project Integrity is to reduce client error by making food stamp applicants and recipients more aware of their responsibility to accurately report household circumstances. This is done through a major news media campaign that focuses on a joint federal-state review of a large sample of cases.

Using State Exchange funds, the Mountain Plains team arranged for representatives from Iowa and South Dakota to go to Utah and make a presentation on how Project Integrity worked in their states. Utah state managers took what they thought were the most effective components of each state's program and came up with their own Project Accuracy.

Utah's version of Project Integrity was the first to go statewide. It encompassed food stamps, AFDC, and Medicaid. FNS' regional office staff worked closely with the state as the project developed, reviewing materials and taking part in training sessions for investigators. The state's media blitz got underway in September, and the project ran through December.

Part of the effort's success was that it fostered a great deal of cooperation.







Audrey Lakes (above) is technical assistance team coordinator for FNS' Western region.

"The offices at the state level worked very closely on this," says Utah's Terry Johnson, coordinator for Project Accuracy. "I think we all have the same goals."

## Western Region

FNS' Western regional office puts a strong emphasis on the team approach. Although team members generally go out alone on technical assistance missions, the entire group gets together once a year to draw on collective experiences in a planning and strategy session. The regional office directs the effort by analyzing state problems through internal reporting documents and federal reviews and targeting specific technical assistance for states.

A big success story for the region, according to team coordinator Audrey Lakes, has been Washington State's progress in increasing prosecutions and investigations. The increase is a result of implementing a fraud prosecution agreement between county prosecutors and the Washington Department of Social Services.

With enhanced funding, FNS pays for 75 percent of the cost of prosecuting food stamp fraud cases. The new agreement in Washington allows the state to pass that funding directly to county prosecutors. This gives county prosecutors incentive to go after welfare fraud cases, which come across their desks for prosecution mingled with homicides and other more serious crimes.

## The results are dramatic

In 1983, prior to the agreement, Washington completed only 6 fraud prosecutions involving just over \$8,000 and only 230 fraud investigations involving \$36,000. Last year, with the agreement in place, the state completed 337 prosecutions involving more than \$150,000 and more than 6,000 investigations involving \$1.7 million. "It's really remarkable," says Lakes.

Arizona has had many success stories involving anti-fraud funding as well. Technical resource team member Charlie Sharp, chief of the Office of Special Investigations for the Arizona Department of Economic Security, has brought many innovations to his state, including a project inspired by a California program.

Last year Sharp sent an assistant to look over the Early Fraud Detection Program in California's Orange County and liked what he heard about it enough to test the idea in a Phoenix certification office for 3 months. The project involved stationing an investigator in the local office to check out cases of suspected fraud before applicants were certified.

Savings from one investigator handling food stamp, AFDC, and general assistance cases over 3 months amounted to \$13,000 in actual dollar savings. "There's no question that it was cost-effective," says Sharp.

"We've found that of 160 referrals in that 3 months, nearly 40 percent were fraudulent." Sharp is working on getting a permanent Early Fraud Detection Program installed in the state's

two major cities, Phoenix and Tucson.

Sharp's office is efficiently set up with a special food stamp fraud unit. "This makes it much easier for me to identify for funding purposes the effectiveness of anti-fraud efforts," he says.

In addition, last April he set up a statewide fraud hotline which consistently generates about 350 calls from the public each month. FNS' 75 percent funding pays for hotline expenses involving food stamp cases. Each referral is followed up. "They're turning in a lot of information to the workers," Sharp says. "We're quite pleased with it."

## Team approach is effective

For all of these technical assistance team initiatives, the real success lies in getting management's commitment, says Western region's Audrey Lakes. "You can best do that by actually going out to the state and presenting yourself as part of a federal-state team, working together toward common objectives."

"It enhances the communication process," she says, "to start out by saying, 'This is a benign mission. It's not a review.' Right away they know you're there to help them—they're not going to get sanctioned as a result of this visit," says Lakes.

The team concept builds on enhanced funding, State Exchange, and other efforts FNS has made to balance incentives with sanction management. This is why the teams have proven to be such an effective way to transfer knowledge and why in so many instances the effort has already resulted in immediate action by states.

"We know that sanctioning states is not what we really want to do, although it sometimes turns out to be the bottom line," says Lakes. "But we really don't want to take money away—we want the states to improve their performance. And I think the technical assistance concept, the team concept, really gets to the heart of that."

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article by Jane Mattern Vachon

Food and Nutrition



# Special Task Force Helps Baltimore Solve Problems

Getting back money for food stamps overissued to recipients is a big problem for many state and local food stamp agencies. In Baltimore, Maryland, a task force of federal, state, and city officials has been working on improving that city's food stamp claims system, and the teamwork has paid off.

As a result of changes enacted by the group, money collected from claims more than quadrupled in just one year. What's more, everyone involved agrees that working closely together has improved communications between federal, state, and local food stamp officials.

## Group formed to solve problems

The task force was formed in June 1984, after a review conducted by staff from the Food and Nutrition Service's Mid-Atlantic regional office (MARO) showed some serious problems with the claims system of the Baltimore City Department of Social Services.

"The review showed that Baltimore's operation was entirely too decentralized," says task force member Jim Goodale, chief of MARO's program accountability and analysis unit.

"There were at least 22 units acting independently, and there was little control of the claims from the time they were established until they were collected. Because we felt that Baltimore's claims system warranted special handling, we decided to suggest to the state that a task force be formed."

Shortly after the task force was organized, Baltimore's program was audited by USDA's Office of Audit. The findings, substantial in number, echoed MARO's concerns. "The system in Baltimore City was so unorganized that the USDA auditors could not track the claims through the system," says Goodale.

According to Baltimore City managers, when the audit was presented to them, there was hardly anything in it they could take exception to.

"It was obvious we needed to improve our operation. We needed to make some significant corrections, and we needed help from the state and federal levels," says Gary Balzer, deputy director for the Baltimore City Department of Social Services and task

force member.

"Because of the extent of the audit, just responding to its recommendations was a huge job. We needed to reorganize to accomplish the recommendations." And that's essentially what the task force did during its monthly meetings.

## A number of changes made

The group, which consists of about a dozen managers and supervisors, took a careful look at the various units and duties assigned to each and came up with a plan to rearrange and consolidate them.

A standard operating procedure was written detailing the control and monitoring of the paper flow, and timeframes were established. Supervisors were designated for the new sections within the claims unit, and responsibilities were assigned to them and their staff.

Centralizing the system significantly corrected Baltimore's problems. With the system now, claims are being accounted for, calculations checked, errors scrutinized, accounts receivable opened, collections pursued, and records maintained.

"Our automated income mainte-

nance system could identify claims, but recoupment wasn't possible because the number of claims was so high," says Balzer. "We had limited ability to collect the monies owed to us.

Reorganizing our existing staff responded to our need for a better claims and recoupment system."

To meet its goals, the task force needed to do a lot of information sharing. From dealing with the claims system used in other states within their region, MARO officials were able to offer some valuable suggestions. The city staff provided information on ways these ideas could fit into their overall operation.

"We gave city officials our ideas on how they could enhance their system," says John Garrett, supervisor of MARO's program accountability unit. "They, in turn, told us whether our ideas were workable.

"There were a lot of things we were not aware of when we began. We needed to figure out, for example, how caseworkers would fit public and general assistance and Medicaid claims into their workload. Initially we were only thinking about food stamp claims."

The Maryland Department of Human Resources was responsible to answer for the review and audit. State agency



At a task force meeting last fall, city, state, and federal officials discussed improvements in Baltimore's claims system. Several city food stamp managers are pictured

here (counterclockwise from bottom right): Gary Balzer, Kathy Lacey, Arthur Wall, Mahfuz Maghal, Thomas Manning, Karen Walker, and Nancy Wegman.



task force members provided quick turnaround on computer printouts that allowed city managers to monitor progress.

### **Group's work has paid off**

Statistical information more than proves the success of the efforts of the task force. The dollar value of claims established increased from \$500,000 during the first three quarters of 1984 to more than \$1.9 million during the same period of 1985. Claims collected during this time increased from \$31,719 to \$47,795.

In addition to improvements in the claims system and the resulting cost savings, there were additional benefits that came from the organization of the group. For one, task force members agree that working together often brought fast resolution to problems.

Nancy Wegman, director of Maryland's Office of Public Assistance,

says working as a task force is much better than "bouncing back and forth with letters and phone calls."

Diplomacy rather than bureaucracy was the key to the success of the task force, according to its members.

"We structured the meetings to be as informal as possible so that we could discuss the problems directly with people at the local level," says Goodale.

"In the past, we have met with state agencies at formal audit conferences where the findings were discussed and timeframes for collective action set. In that situation, it's usually a 2-hour meeting, and a lot of correspondence takes place by mail afterwards before anything is resolved."

Task force meetings, on the other hand, lasted longer but provided more immediate results. "We sat down in a room with the state people and the Baltimore City staff and went back and forth with ideas until we found ways to

resolve the problems," says Goodale. "As a result of these sessions, Baltimore City's claims processing began to take shape as a workable system within 6 months."

### **Working together is now easier**

The informality of the group rested the fears of city officials who felt they may be excluded from the decision-making process.

"I think that when the task force began there was an element of suspicion," says Balzer. "There was a feeling that everything we did was under a microscope. As the meetings progressed, it became apparent that the federal and state people were receptive to our ideas, and they didn't try to undermine our authority. The federal and state people were there to listen to us."

Another added benefit is the improvement in the relationships between offices.

"This was the first time the three levels of government sat down together to look at a problem," says Goodale. "I have seen a tremendous turnaround in the attitudes of the people who are on the task force."

"My staff, for example, have a much better rapport with both the Baltimore City Department of Social Services and the state agency, as well as a different level of respect for them."

State agency staff say they are working more closely with FNS than they ever have. And city representatives say they now have no qualms about speaking directly to federal officials—something that wasn't true before.

Even though the audit is near closure, the group has agreed to continue to work together on other aspects of the Food Stamp Program on an as-needed basis.

For more information, contact: Nancy Wegman, Director  
Office of Public Assistance  
Department of Human Resources  
300 West Preston Street  
Baltimore, Maryland 21201  
Telephone: (301)-576-5443

*article by Marian Wig  
photos by Larry Rana*



With the recent changes made as a result of task force recommendations, it's now easier for the Baltimore staff to collect overpayments made to food stamp recipients.

Here, two caseworkers from the overissuance unit, Virginia Johnson and Francis Jackson, check information from the computer files.



# Mid-Atlantic Region Hosts Equipment Conference

Helping state and local food program staff sharpen their management skills has been the goal of a number of technical assistance efforts sponsored by the Food and Nutrition Service. Bringing people together to share skills and information has been a key part of many of these efforts.

This spring, FNS' Mid-Atlantic regional office (MARO) hosted a conference on procuring equipment for school kitchens. The first equipment conference FNS has ever sponsored, it gave state and local school food service managers the chance to talk directly with food service equipment representatives, industry consultants, and school lunch directors who have solved equipment-related problems.

"The conference was designed to provide an opportunity for school food service administrators to view exhibits of the latest food service equipment and to learn directly from industry representatives," says Robert Freiler, regional director of special nutrition programs for MARO.

"One of the most important things for school lunch managers to learn is how to develop specifications that will allow them to get the equipment they need without spending more than they have to for it."

## Suggested at an earlier conference

The conference was planned as a follow-up to MARO's successful food procurement conference held in Downingtown, Pennsylvania, in April 1983, and was, in fact, suggested by participants at that conference.

The high attendance at the equipment conference proved that the idea was a popular one. More than 200 local school food service people from throughout the Mid-Atlantic states attended, along with 60 representatives from 25 major food service manufacturers.

The conference, which was held in Williamsburg, Virginia, featured panel discussions on a variety of topics and exhibits ranging from freezers, stoves, and salad bars, to complete systems for bulk preparation of food.

Conferees had plenty of time to talk with exhibitors about their equipment needs and problems. Exhibitors and panelists alike stressed the importance

of properly selecting equipment.

## Panelists stress careful planning

One panel of experts discussed the most common problems encountered when procuring equipment. Panelists included an equipment sales representative, a food service consultant, a food service equipment manufacturer, and a local school food service manager.

They explained how to develop specifications and how to accurately describe the specific piece of equipment needed. They also told conferees how they can avoid being "stuck" with equipment that does not meet their needs by securing detailed information on what they need and by writing very detailed specifications.

A panel of local school food service directors summarized their recent experiences with cafeteria renovation and talked about how they secured funds for their projects. This panel of peers shared the problems they had to deal with in order to make needed changes. With ingenuity and some minor structural, design, and equipment changes, they told the group, cafeteria renovation is possible at a minimal cost.

Panelist Sara Stevenson, food service supervisor for the Indian River School District in Frankford, Delaware, stressed the importance of community and school board support.

Lynda Baltzer, food service supervisor for the Capital School District in Dover, Delaware, described the renovation of a school cafeteria built in 1922. The renovation, she said, has not only given the cafeteria a facelift, but has made a noticeable improvement in the way students feel about school lunch.

A presentation on planning new and remodeled kitchens focused on learning from other people's mistakes. Using slides, food service systems specialist Victor Canevello identified some common problems resulting from errors made in planning, construction, and design. He showed, for example, how placing equipment just a few inches off specifications could ruin the efficiency of a kitchen.

Besides panel discussions on equipment, there were also some special



Baking is just one of the tasks made easier in a carefully designed and properly equipped school kitchen.

presentations. These included a food demonstration using USDA-donated rice; a presentation on foods of the future, including dehydrated fruits and vegetables; a presentation by the Dairy Council on merchandising and using dairy products; and a discussion on the implementation of a school food service program in Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

## Conference was a cooperative effort

From the start, the conference was a cooperative effort. Planning for the conference included a survey of state agencies to determine interests and needs, and the agenda later developed was based on state agency suggestions for topics and exhibits.

Vera Adkins, conference coordinator for the American School Food Service Association, shared her expertise on planning exhibit areas. She outlined exhibit area requirements, provided a



# SNAP SNAP

sample contract, and assisted in the selection of the firm to handle setting up and taking down the displays.

According to FNS conference coordinator Rich Mallam, the logistics were complicated. "The biggest challenge," he says, "was lining up interested companies and meeting their needs, while complying with the requirements and limitations of the decorator, the conference center, and the firm handling the heavy equipment."

Making sure tons of equipment would be shipped, delivered, and set up in time was just the beginning for conference planners. They also had to make sure each exhibitor would have enough space as well as access to electricity and, in some cases, water, and they had to make sure their plans complied with local fire codes.

"In order to pull this whole thing off," says Mallam, "we needed additional wiring. Even the air conditioning needed to be modified so that enough electricity could be supplied." Mallam credits the conference staff for playing a key role in making sure everything went smoothly.

## Participants found conference worthwhile

For participating in the conference, school food service staff received certificates from FNS. Continuing education credits were available through the American Dietetic Association and the American School Food Service Association. These credits are important to members for professional growth and maintenance of their certification.

Evaluation comments received at the end of the conference were positive. Participants felt they had benefited most from the presentations on equipment specifications, cafeteria redesign, and planning for new and redesigned kitchens. They also found the equipment exhibits helpful.

For more information, contact:  
Rich Mallam  
School Programs  
Mid-Atlantic Regional Office  
Food and Nutrition Service, USDA  
CN 02150  
Trenton, New Jersey 08650  
Telephone: (609) 259-5182

## SNAP Project Catches On In the Southwest

School lunch programs work best when there's open communication between food service staff, parents, and students. In the Southwest, a project called SNAP—School Nutrition Action Project—is encouraging open communication and helping schools make positive changes in their lunch programs.

The project, which began in one school in New Mexico, is now catching on in schools in several states, thanks to FNS' Southwest regional office.

### Project began in Albuquerque

A group of concerned parents gave birth to the project at Albuquerque's Longfellow Elementary School when they petitioned Elaine Atkins, food service director for the Albuquerque public schools, to make some major changes in their children's school lunch menus. Atkins was a bit hesitant when the parents' demands were first laid before her, but realized that the motivation the group had could be a powerful ally if channeled in the right direction.

"Some of the changes they wanted to make were financially impossible," she says, "and others just weren't nutritionally sound. What we finally agreed to do was to form a smaller working group where the parents and I would review the menus and work on modifications. Then we would call the entire group back together and discuss what we could and couldn't do."

Extensive negotiations finally culminated in menus both sides were pleased with. Some of the modifications included such things as using whole wheat flour in all baked goods and bread items, serving fresh fruits and vegetables as often as possible and, when canned fruits are served, using those that are packed in their

own juices rather than in syrup.

Because of the success in working with parents and making changes at Longfellow, Atkins decided to formalize the process in a project that could be expanded to other Albuquerque schools. She set three main goals: involving parents and students; modifying menus; and building a nutrition network that could help schools teach children to take responsibility for their own well-being by arming them with solid nutrition knowledge.

### Other schools eager to join

Other Albuquerque schools were quick to join. In addition to Longfellow, more than 30 public schools in the city now have SNAP. To participate, each school must set up a nutrition committee and incorporate nutrition education into its curriculum.

The nutrition committee, usually composed of the cafeteria manager, the school nurse, a teacher, a parent and a couple of students, is responsible for evaluating school menus and making many of the decisions on what changes will be made. Committee members evaluate the success or failure of the changes and make adjustments accordingly.

"One issue that always comes up is whether or not chocolate milk should be served," Atkins says.

Opinions on the subject run the entire gambit. "Some people are convinced that chocolate is going to ruin us all," says Atkins. "Others are willing to tolerate it if it's the only way they can get their kids to drink milk."

"Many schools," she continues, "take a middle ground and offer chocolate milk twice a week, or so." Atkins tries to allow the schools as many internal decisions as possible.

"I want each school to feel that the project is theirs," she says. "They have to ask to become a SNAP school." The request can come from the school nurse, counselor, principal, a teacher, a parent—anyone who is interested.

### Motivation is key to success

One thing Atkins and her staff learned from the Longfellow experience was that the project works best



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when motivation is already present within the school community.

As a result, they have relied mainly on word-of-mouth advertising for bringing schools into the program. They have, however, readily accepted invitations to speak to interested groups, and they have published a booklet to explain the program to school staff, teachers, students, and parents. The booklet outlines the project's guidelines and contains related nutrition information, health hints, and class projects.

Adkins' staff includes a nutrition coordinator who is responsible for the nutrition education component of SNAP. She conducts one in-service workshop per month for food service employees, plus two full-day training

sessions during the year for cafeteria managers. On request, she makes nutrition education presentations to students in their classrooms.

She also publishes a newsletter which contains, among other things, nutrition education lessons that can be adapted by teachers for classroom use. The newsletter is distributed to all

schools, each of the district's area offices, and to the school system's curriculum staff.

Adkins' staff is currently working with nutrition experts at the University of New Mexico on a curriculum which Adkins hopes to disseminate throughout the district once it has been developed and tested.

## **Participating schools see positive changes**

Preliminary results of a research project Adkins conducted, again in conjunction with the University of New Mexico, show that children in SNAP schools have a significantly more positive attitude toward school lunch than do children without SNAP.

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Good food and nutrition education go hand in hand for schools participating in SNAP. Begun in New Mexico, the project is now catching on in other Southwest states.







The positive attitude came through loud and clear for Jan Jones, chief of the school nutrition programs unit for the Food and Nutrition Service's Southwest region, when she visited Albuquerque for a first-hand look at SNAP in action.

Part of the beauty of the project, says Jones, is its simplicity. "The menu modifications the schools are making are quick and easy. They boil down to simply incorporating the dietary guidelines into their menu-planning process.

"This is really nothing new," she adds, "because the dietary guidelines have been part of the school lunch menu planning guide for several years. SNAP, however, gives the concept a keener focus.

"Albuquerque schools have also taken full advantage of parent and student involvement in the project and are indirectly using it as a marketing tool. The end result is increased stature for school lunch in the community. They seem to be reaping enormous benefits from making a few simple changes."

### **Taking the idea to the states**

Jones and others at the regional office level were convinced this was an idea other school districts could use. They felt they could do regionally what Adkins had done in Albuquerque—that is, make the SNAP concept known, offer assistance if needed, then wait for interest to be shown.

They began by presenting the SNAP concept to state directors of school nutrition and food distribution programs and incorporating the directors' suggestions into an overall project design.

They kept the three components of SNAP—menu modification, parent and student involvement, and nutrition education—but wrote SNAP objectives broadly enough to accommodate differences among states and schools.

To help communities learn about and use the project, the regional staff developed a slide and tape presentation and a prototype press packet for use by both state agencies and local school districts.

The slide/tape series, in addition to explaining what SNAP is, explores how eating habits are developed and how research is now showing that our health may be related to our dietary habits.

The prototype press packet provides a sample news release, two taped public service announcements that can be reproduced and distributed locally, sample fact sheets, and a few important tips on planning a successful publicity campaign or media event, such as inviting local reporters to join students for a SNAP lunch.

To encourage idea-sharing, Jones and her staff put together a bulletin called "SNAP-Shots." A concise summary of SNAP activities occurring at the state and local levels, "SNAP-Shots" is distributed periodically throughout the Southwest region.

### **States respond in various ways**

As Jones explains, each state agency's approach to SNAP has been different. "Some, like the Oklahoma Department of Human Services, which administers the private school programs, liked what they saw, trained their food service personnel during summer workshops, and implemented the concept with the opening of school this fall."

The education departments in Louisiana and New Mexico presented the SNAP concept this spring and summer at school food service association conventions and other meetings and workshops for local school food service personnel.

The Oklahoma Department of Education decided to target SNAP toward their largest school districts first and, in Texas, the Department of Human Services saw a logical role for SNAP in their Nutrition Education and Training (NET) Program.

During the coming year, Jones hopes states in the region will focus on different aspects of SNAP and share with each other what they develop. The FNS regional office's role will be to facilitate this sharing.

"One thing we hope to accomplish is to place our school programs back in a position of leadership," she adds. "People today are extremely interested in health and fitness. It's a perfect opportunity for school nutrition programs to become known as a reliable source for nutrition information and to play an important role in combatting misinformation."

Each issue of "SNAP-Shots" ends with the slogan "Better Nutrition is a SNAP." For schools in the Southwest, it's a slogan—and a reality—that's becoming increasingly familiar.

For more information on SNAP, contact:

H.H. Pullium, Regional Director  
Special Nutrition Programs  
Southwest Regional Office  
Food and Nutrition Service, USDA  
1000 Commerce Street  
Dallas, Texas 75242  
Telephone: (214) 767-0214

*article by C. Kay Blakley*



# Newsletter Helps Midwest States Share Information

When the state education commissioners in the Midwest directed their staff to make nutrition and fitness a priority, the Food and Nutrition Service's Midwest regional office (MWRO) looked for a way to help.

What they came up with is a newsletter called "Nutrition and Fitness—A Winning Combination." Like "SNAP-Shots" in the Southwest, the newsletter is a vehicle for sharing information and ideas on nutrition activities.

"Nutrition and Fitness" is put together by MWRO's nutrition and technical services staff in cooperation with the region's child nutrition program staff. The newsletter features brief articles researched and written by regional office staff or by state NET (Nutrition Education and Training Program) coordinators.

Articles highlight exemplary state activities as well as successful classroom and cafeteria activities in individual school districts. The newsletter also includes a calendar of nutrition events throughout the Midwest and descriptions of available nutrition education materials.

## Format allows states flexibility

In planning the newsletter, the MWRO staff looked for an approach that would allow states the most flexibility in using the information. "What we came up with," says Robert Dean, nutrition and technical services director for the region, "is a format that makes it easy for state staff to excerpt topics that are of interest to their schools."

When the regional staff finishes putting together an issue of the newsletter, they give each state department of education what is called a "camera ready" copy. If the state staff wants to send out the entire newsletter, they can use this camera-ready material to have copies printed. If they want to excerpt sections of the newsletter, they simply pull out what they want and include the information in their own materials.

Each state has chosen its own method for distributing the newsletter. Minnesota, Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin regularly reprint excerpts in their food service newsletters that go to local school superintendents and

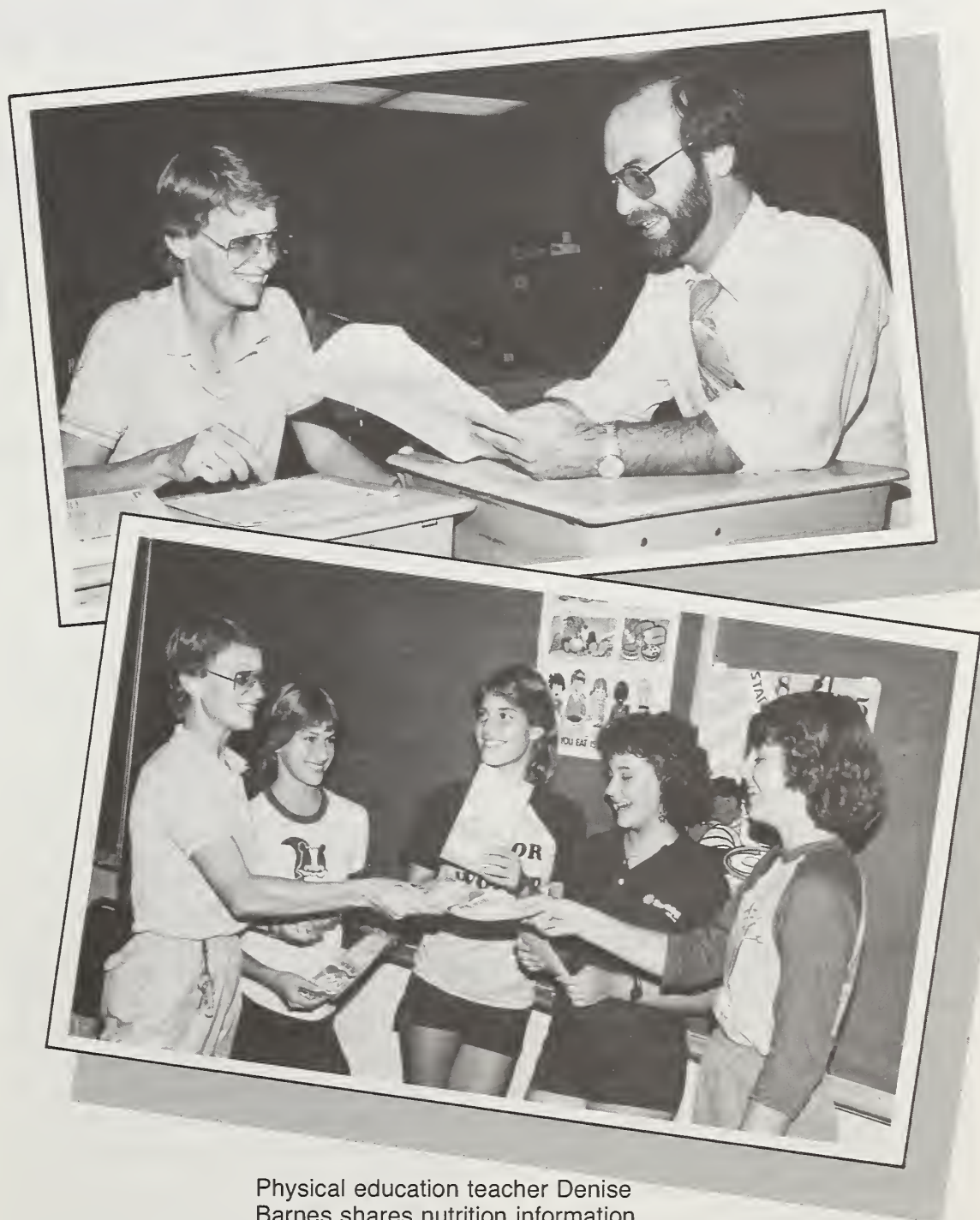
food service directors. Michigan's staff duplicates some of the issues and sends them out with their newsletter. Ohio also uses entire issues.

In addition to using the material in regular mailings, some states have also planned special distributions. For example, when Wisconsin received the directive to teach fitness in the classroom, state staff included the newsletter in a mailing of nutrition aids to approximately 500 physical education teachers. The Ohio staff mailed 3,000 copies to physical education teachers, school nurses, home economics

teachers, and food service directors.

Denise Barnes of Winfield, Illinois, is one of the physical education teachers who have been using the newsletter this year. She says she's found it helpful in her work with students, especially since limited budgets have made it difficult to secure teaching aids even though the school principal and superintendent are supportive of nutrition and fitness awareness.

"Winfield is a typical suburban community whose school district is suffering from a lack of funds because of a decrease in student population," says



Physical education teacher Denise Barnes shares nutrition information from the newsletter with principal Joe McHaley and students.



# New Training Packets From New York Filled With Ideas

Barnes.

"The school no longer has special classes such as home economics, so nutrition has to be incorporated into the health and physical education classes."

When public attention was drawn to eating disorders like anorexia and bulimia, Barnes began to be concerned about the girls in her classes.

"Because my class is informal," she says, "I talk a lot with the girls. I found that fad diets were popular with the girls and there was a great deal of misinformation among the girls and their parents."

"The 'Nutrition and Fitness' newsletter helped me secure some really current information and teaching materials. I was able to find sources of publications, handouts and charts, and order them from the addresses given at little cost to the school. I also learned about some computer software programs that teach nutrition concepts."

## MWRO pleased with results

FNS' Midwest regional staff is pleased to see that the newsletter is facilitating exchange among states. Interestingly enough, the process of planning the newsletter has also encouraged exchange *within* some states.

"In planning the newsletter," says Dick Gilbert, assistant chief for MWRO's school programs section, "the state child nutrition directors, the state NET coordinators, and the state physical education coordinators exchanged ideas with regional staff. In a number of instances, this helped the state staff have a more coordinated idea of how they wanted to approach nutrition and fitness efforts."

Since the first issue of "Nutrition and Fitness" came out in September 1984, there have been five additional issues, including one this month. For a copy, or for more information, write:

Information Staff  
Midwest Regional Office, FNS, USDA  
50 East Washington  
Chicago, Illinois 60602

A new series of training packets is helping school lunch managers throughout New York State and may soon be helping managers in other states as well.

The packets, which contain information and suggestions for increasing school lunch participation, were developed by staff from the New York Department of Education, who worked closely with local school districts, parents, and students on them.

"We initiated the project to respond to needs expressed at the school and district levels," says Rebecca Gardner, who heads New York's Bureau of Health Education and Services and is NET (Nutrition Education and Training Program) coordinator for the state.

"Over and over, in workshops and meetings, school lunch directors had asked us for help and materials, and especially for posters and recipes. 'Give us materials and tell us how to use them' is the message we kept getting from these busy people. The kits were designed to do that."

## Ideas came from all over

The state's health education and food management staff worked together to write and assemble the text and artwork for the packets.

There are 10 packets in all, with suggestions that can help school food service managers promote the value of school lunches, plan and serve meals kids like, and make the cafeteria a center of cheerful activities. State NET coordinators are conducting workshops to help food service staff apply the ideas in their own cafeterias.

In developing the kits, the staff drew material from all over. Ideas for garnishes were taken directly from a merchandising manual developed by eight Southeast states and distributed by FNS' Southeast regional office.

Other ideas were contributed by the state school food management staff, who kept an eye out for good ideas on their regular visits to monitor school lunch programs. The packet editors followed up on these tips by calling school lunch managers for more information, and sometimes modifying an idea to make it more effective or easier

to adapt.

"It's foolish to duplicate efforts when so many excellent materials already exist," says Gardner. "Really new ideas are rare, but the information out there is not always convenient and accessible."

"These kits put information and resources at the finger tips of the people who plan and prepare each day's menus for the more than 2,700,000 children in New York schools."

The kits come in pocket folders with a different color for each of the 10 school months. The staff chose this format to make it easy for school lunch managers to remove and copy text and clip art and to add material to keep the packets up to date.

"We expect the packets to be used selectively," says Gardner. "Sometimes school staff will copy the materials directly, and sometimes they will simply use them to stimulate ideas. The packets are especially useful in training new school food service workers."

## Each packet has a theme

"We decided to organize the material around a different theme or goal for each month," Gardner explains. "For example, the first volume has a getting-acquainted theme. Notes for the back of menus tell students, staff, and parents how the program operates and what constitutes a balanced meal. Complimentary meals are suggested as a promotion to introduce first graders to school lunches."

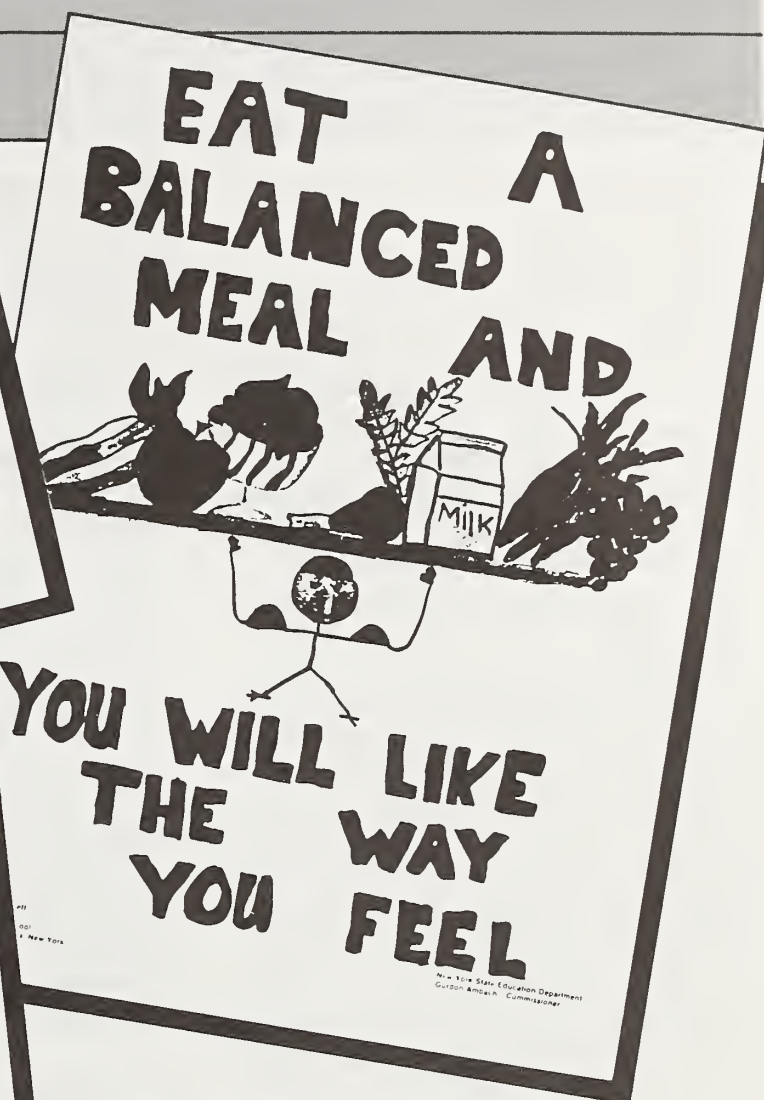
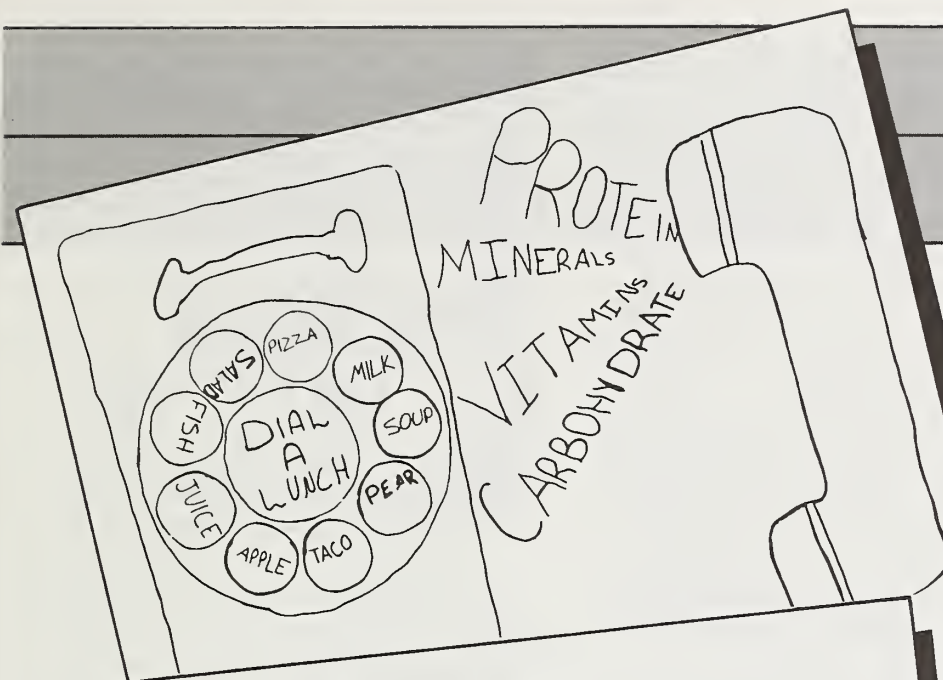
Another volume focuses on the bread and cereal food group and offers facts on the staple foods of other cultures. This packet urges directors to "toot your horn" during National School Lunch Week, and shows them how to present news and facts to the local media and community.

Another, which encourages the use of USDA-donated foods, includes a special section of commodity recipes in 100-serving sizes. The recipes were tested by a group of food service people attending an institute supported by an NET grant in Troy last year.

The group developed recipes for the finger foods that appeal to kids today, as well as dishes that reflect the ethnic

article and photos  
by Mary Jane Getlinger





These are three of the lively and colorful posters included in the training packets. They were done by children for a state-wide poster contest.

diversity of student tastes, such as *adobo*, a rice and pork casserole from the Philippines, quiche, and vegetarian bean tacos.

Other packets suggest ways to write and present a menu for holidays and other special occasions, how to involve children in decorating the cafeteria, and how to keep their interest with contests and prizes. For example, a child might win a prize for the best guess of the number of corn kernels in a jar, or for simply being at the cashier's table when a bell rings.

Each volume is introduced by a user's guide that explains the theme and suggests ways in which the contents may be used. Among the items included are menu layouts, models for cafeteria decorations, recipes, garnishes to make food more attractive, and activities children can look forward to, such as games, puzzles, and contests.

Menu-back fillers include information on nutrition, letters to enlist the interest and support of parents, and surveys to help managers find out what foods children prefer.

In addition to special theme material, all packets contain ideas that can be used throughout the year. They also include prize-winning art from the children. "We recently had a statewide nutrition poster contest for elementary students," Gardner explains. "The winning posters were so fresh and appealing, we used them to illustrate our themes. Each module contains a two-color or full-color reproduction of one of the winning posters."

The state department of education staff worked on developing the kits from March to September 1984. In December 1984, they began distributing copies to each of the state's 728 public school districts and 43 Boards of Co-operative Educational Services (admin-

istrative units that combine resources of small school districts). Gardner estimates that almost 90 percent of school districts are now using the materials.

#### Local directors closely involved

From the start of the project, Gardner and the staff were eager to involve school food service personnel. After they issued the first four modules, they asked readers to rate the materials and to suggest ways to improve them.

As a result of the suggestions, the staff added more commodity recipes and more puzzles and activities geared to younger children. For directors who wanted to send home to parents recipes for some of the children's favorite lunch dishes, they included recipes adjusted for family-sized kitchens. These can be printed on the backs of menus



# Nancy Kay Sullivan:

## Working for WIC In Mississippi

In Mississippi, Nancy Kay Sullivan, director of public relations for the Mississippi Department of Health, heads up information activities for the state's WIC program. Sullivan, along with one part-time and six full-time assistants, plays an integral role in getting food help and health care to mothers and children who need it.

WIC, which stands for the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children, provides supplemental foods and nutrition education to low-income pregnant and breastfeeding women, infants, and children up to age 5 who are determined to be at risk because of nutrition-related health problems or inadequate diet.

WIC is just one of the 28 programs for which Sullivan has public relations responsibility. "All of our programs are equally important to us," she says, "but WIC is one of my favorites."

Like most government managers today, Sullivan has to work with limited resources. "There is too little time, staff, and money to accomplish everything I'd like to," she says.

But, according to John Barr, WIC director for the Bureau of Personal Health Services, Sullivan accomplishes plenty for WIC. "She is one of a kind," he says. "We're lucky to have her."

### Work closely with local staff

Sullivan and her staff pride themselves on the strong link that exists between the state office, the 9 district offices, and the 82 county health departments. The cooperation and support of the district and county staff, Sullivan says, is crucial.

"Because of the strength of these relationships," she says, "information flows very smoothly within the state. Over the past 6 years, we have developed a standard public relations policy that all local agencies use. When we

under the heading "From Our Kitchen to Yours."

The state staff continue to work closely with local school food service managers. At the request of a school food service association or other sponsor, the NET staff make presentations on the materials at workshops held in various locations in the state. The sponsor picks the site for these presentations and invites participants.

Gordon Odermann, one of the state's three regional NET coordinators, has led a number of these workshops.

"First, we review the contents of the packets," he says. "Then, we choose an idea from one of the modules and carry it all the way through. For instance, we might choose a picnic and talk about how to promote the event. Without a big budget, you have to use a lot of imagination."

"We teach school lunch directors techniques like enlarging clip art onto poster board using an overhead projector. We might also create a menu, write a letter to parents, make table tents to alert the kids, and think up rules and prizes for a contest."

"Most directors will protest that they are not artists. When we have a workshop, the first thing they do is hand the pencil to someone else at their table. But after they actually complete a project together, their attitudes change."

To make it easier for people to use the materials, the state staff included an index for quick reference. "We didn't want these modules to wind up under a pile of papers," says Gardner.

### Response has been positive

From the response so far, the modules are not likely to wind up under a pile of papers. In addition to the positive survey results, another measure of the modules' success is the creative ways school food service personnel are using them.

This is evident in the materials school food personnel bring along to show-and-tell workshop sessions. "In one packet," says Odermann, "everyone receives a picture of a tray to use in displaying the day's menu. But schools may complete it in different ways."

"In some, younger children have cut

out food pictures from trade magazines. In others, art classes from higher grades have drawn and painted the items."

As the state staff had hoped, the modules are being used as resources to support the priorities of individual school lunchrooms and classrooms. One superintendent has already ordered a set so that he can integrate school lunch activities into the whole range of classroom teaching.

The completed project has been received with enthusiasm by school food workers throughout New York. Nutrition educators from the six other Northeast states have asked to use or adapt the materials. And best of all, more children are eating school lunches.

"Sixty percent of all schools using the kit have increased lunchroom participation," says Gardner. "We know the modules account for some of that growth."

### For more information

The New York State Education Department will provide single free copies of the packets (everything except the posters) as long as supplies last. For a copy, or for more information, contact: Bureau of School Food Management and Nutrition

State Education Department  
99 Washington Avenue  
Albany, New York 12230  
Telephone: (518) 474-1765

Copies of the posters may be obtained from the New York State School Food Service Association, which has reprinted them. Five posters are available, at a cost of \$2.00 each, plus \$1.50 for postage and handling.

Write to either:  
Maria Riska  
Phoenix Central School  
400 Volney Street  
Phoenix, New York 13135  
Telephone: (315) 695-1516

Marcia Germaine  
Burned Hills Ballston Lake  
Central School  
50 Cypress Drive  
Scotia, New York 12302  
Telephone: (518) 399-9141

article by Wini Scheffler



have a message that needs to get down to the people, we are certain that the entire state will be blanketed with that same message."

Hurricane Elena proved just how well coordinated state and local efforts are. Fast and efficient teamwork enabled the health department to get information out quickly to people affected by the storm. For WIC, the situation was complicated by damage to WIC food supplies stored in county warehouses.

"More than \$20,000 worth of infant formula was lost," Sullivan explains. "The stock in Pascagoula was 100-percent condemned. Cereals were wet and the labels had come off the formula, making it impossible to identify the contents."

"Besides the loss of the stock, the population served by WIC was the hardest hit. Some Mississippi recipients were without bottles for their children; there was no water; and housing

was a problem for many WIC recipients.

"Our staff living on the coast were suffering from their own personal loss and tragedy, but they were in the office on the job within 48 hours after Elena hit, ready to do whatever they could to help the clients. The team spirit and dedication to the program kept us running," Sullivan recalls.

"Elena hit on Monday. On Tuesday we had infant formula for distribution, and by Wednesday we had issued a press release letting participants know where to go to pick up their supplemental packages on Thursday."

#### **Materials tailored to clients' needs**

As public relations director for WIC, Sullivan sees getting nutrition information to WIC recipients as an important part of her job.

"We target our efforts to females between 12 and 45," says Sullivan, "but

even the 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds picking up our materials and looking at the pictures will grasp some of the meaning."

The staff works hard to make certain that the words, graphics, and format of the materials communicate directly to WIC recipients. It is important that they understand the message but aren't left feeling they are being talked down to. The public health staff is aiming to change recipients' eating habits and in the long run improve the health of their families as well.

In their efforts to reach WIC recipients with nutrition information, Sullivan's office has been involved in the printing of the popular "Mississippi WIC Cookbook."

When the book was first published, Sullivan held press conferences in all nine Mississippi districts to introduce the book to WIC recipients, media representatives, and health department staff. County nutritionists used recipes from the book to prepare food with WIC ingredients for people at the press conference to taste.

The cookbook received positive reviews from the media as well as WIC recipients, who liked it enough to pass along the information they learned to neighbors and relatives. "We're looking forward to a revision and fourth printing of the cookbook," says Sullivan.

#### **Mississippi has unusual program**

A unique aspect of Mississippi's WIC program is its use of a direct distribution system for WIC food packages. Mississippi is the only state in the nation that operates exclusively with food distribution centers instead of giving WIC recipients vouchers to exchange at authorized food stores.

The distribution centers are warehouses located in all 82 counties. "We hear comments from other states suggesting that transportation would be an overwhelming disadvantage for their clients, but this system works best for us in Mississippi," says Sullivan.

"We have a very strong sense of family in Mississippi," she adds. "Some clients have to travel 10 to 15 miles to get to the food distribution center, but they work it out. Sally might not have a car, but Bobby Joe does, and he'll see that she gets there. We take care of each other."



Nancy Kay Sullivan and her staff have a full schedule providing information support for WIC and other programs of the Mississippi Department of Health. Working January 1986

with 9 district offices and 82 county offices, they play a key role in getting information and educational materials to WIC participants throughout the state.



Compared to other states' WIC programs, Mississippi's food cost per participant is one of the lowest in the nation. The direct distribution of food is credited with this low cost. Because Mississippi can purchase products in large volume, the state is able to get a lower overall price than individual buyers.

This past year, the state adopted an "all or nothing" bid system for products, cutting the cost of a case of infant formula from \$26.00 in 1984 to \$14.16 in 1985. This year a case of formula will cost the state only \$11.85.

This has enabled the state to serve more participants through WIC and has also allowed the state to introduce a popular new form of milk into the food package.

Because there is little or no refrigeration at the food distribution centers, dry milk and evaporated milk had been the milk products offered to partici-

pants. However, once money became available, the state WIC staff decided to purchase UHT (ultra-high temperature) low-fat milk for WIC participants. Sullivan was called on to help educate WIC clients about the new product.

"We needed to explain that the milk is fine on the shelf until it is opened, then it needs to be refrigerated," Sullivan says.

The public relations staff prepared 1-page fliers on the new product for WIC participants, and articles for publication in the journal *Mississippi's Health* for health professionals.

**"There's always a lot to do ..."**

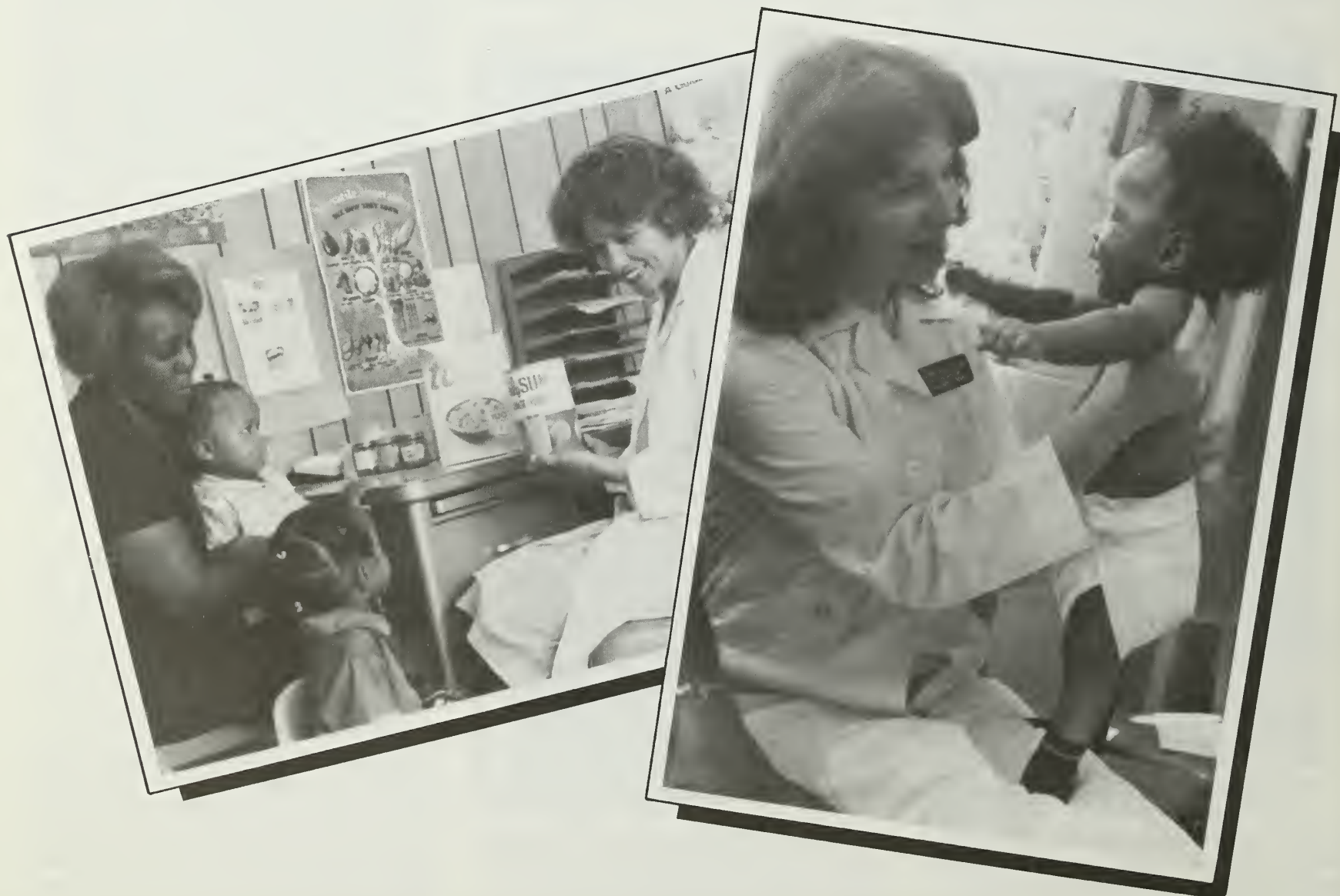
Other projects Sullivan's staff are routinely involved in include: producing press kits for the media and information materials for health professionals throughout the state; preparing brochures and pamphlets requested by lo-

cal and state nutritionists for use in teaching WIC participants; and putting together slide shows and audio-visual materials for special presentations. They have one of the Southeast's largest health-related audio-visual libraries for educators.

"There is always a lot to do for WIC," says Sullivan. "The program people are very creative and keep us busy. It's rewarding to have a part in making WIC work for Mississippi."

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# 1984-1985

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U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Food and Nutrition Service  
Alexandria, Virginia 22302

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Published four times a year by  
the Food and Nutrition Service,  
U.S. Department of Agriculture,  
Washington, D.C. 20250

**John R. Block**  
Secretary of Agriculture

**John W. Bode**  
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Food and Nutrition Service

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**Jan Proctor**, Art Director

Yearly subscription: \$11.00 domestic, \$13.75 foreign. Single copies: \$3.00 domestic, \$3.75 foreign. Send subscription orders to Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402. These prices are subject to change without notice by the Government Printing Office.

The Secretary of Agriculture has determined that the publication of this periodical is necessary in the transaction of the public business required by law of this Department. The use of funds for printing this publication was approved by the Director of the Office of Management and Budget June 22, 1984.

Prints of photos may be obtained from Photo Library, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

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# Food & Nutrition

*Food and Nutrition* is a magazine of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In it you'll find articles on the family food assistance and child nutrition programs administered by USDA's Food and Nutrition Service in cooperation with state governments and local agencies.

A yearly subscription is \$11.00 for four issues. Foreign subscriptions are \$13.75. To subscribe, mail a check or money order, payable to the Superintendent of Documents, to the following address: Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402. These prices are subject to change without notice by the Government Printing Office.



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